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WAXMAN AUTHORS MEDICARE DRUG BILL

Congressman Henry A. Waxman (D-LA) is the co-author of a bill which would extend Medicare coverage to pay for most prescription drugs taken by the elderly for chronic diseases.

If the Waxman sponsored bill is enacted into law, those who would benefit most are Medicare recipients suffering from such serious long-term diseases as arthritis, rheumatism, high or low blood pressure, heart disease, emphysema, and cancer.

The measure would not cover prescriptions for brief acute ailments.

In discussing the prescription drug bill, Congressman Waxman emphasized the financial problems of Medicare recipients whose health makes it necessary to take one or more prescription drugs every day for the rest of their lives. The Congressman said,

"When a senior citizen discovers that he has heart disease, he also discovers that he may have to take as many as four or five different types of prescription drugs regularly. His doctor may prescribe digitalis to strengthen his heart beat, anticoagulant drugs to prevent strokes or blood

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clots, and special drugs to lower blood pressure. Similarly, a diabetic patient may have to take insulin daily. Currently Medicare pays for no prescriptions. Yet, many living on Social Security simply cannot afford to pay for their minimum rent, food and clothing needs and also pay for several hundred dollars worth of prescription drugs."

Under the bill, Medicare patients buying prescription drugs would pay a nominal \$1 charge for each prescription. They would not pay monthly premiums or be required to file any sort of claims or keep any kind of records. The program would be financed through the payroll deduction portion of the Medicare program.

The senior author of the Waxman backed Medicare drug coverage bill, Congressman David R. Obey of Wisconsin, expressed fears that the bad state of the national economy might make it difficult to enact the bill this year. Both Obey and Waxman are trying very hard to convince their colleagues that the current economic difficulties make the bill more necessary than ever before. They argue that the burden of paying for drugs for long term illnesses is especially great during a period such as this when prices are high, and many of the children of Medicare recipients are having financial difficulties as a result of unemployment and the slow pace of business.

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